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Chapter 6 section 1 a

THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CIRCUIT RIDER - *Dr. John Craig*

Of the persons most prominent in the early history of our pioneer ancestry, special mention should be made of Dr. John Craig, for the reason that he exerted so much telling influence upon the immediate lives of those persons who pioneered the counties of Pocahontas, Greenbrier, Monroe and Kanawha. He is moreover a type of the persons whose names were embalmed by so many of our ancestors with all their hearts could give, "their praises and their tears."

Dr. Craig was a Master of Arts by graduation from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. For twenty-five years he ministered to the Old Stone Church, in Augusta county (Lewisburg) walking five miles to preach Sabbath morning, and when Indians were troublesome would carry his own trusty rifle along with Bible and Psalm book. Services would begin at 10 a.m., recess for one hour for lunch at noon, then preaching until sundown. Sometimes on Sacramental occasions, a candle was needed to read the closing hymn. When some of the congregation would ride ten or twelve miles to their homes, and after doing up the household chores, would go to bed at midnight. One of his sermons still extant is laid off in fifty-five divisions.

When Braddock was defeated, mainly by the skillful management of Pontiac in 1764, thus leaving all west of the Blue Ridge Mountains exposed to Indian incursions, the inhabitants in utter consternation were talking about flight somewhere back to Pennsylvania

or over the mountains toward Williamsburg, so as to be near the seat of Government, and the safety it implied. The undaunted preacher was opposed to all such scheme. In his journal he thus writes:

"I oppose that scheme as a scandal to our nation, felling below our brave ancestors, (in Scotland) making ourselves a reproach among Virginians, a dishonor to our friends at home, an evidence of cowardice, want of faith and noble Christian dependence on God as able to save and deliver from the heathen; and withal a lasting blot forever on all our posterity."

This valiant old soldier of two banners,—the banner of the Cross, and the banner of civil and religious freedom,—advised the erection of forts. In his journal he writes: "My own flock required me to go before them in the work, which I did cheerfully, though it cost me one-third of my estate; but the people followed me and my congregation in less than two months was well fortified."

There are a number of people living in Pocahontas today whose ancestors assisted in the erection of the forts referred to. With such an example, his people maintained their homes most bravely through all of the fiery trials of that period so eventful in results, as far reaching as the civilized world and even to the regions beyond. What remains of this brave patriots recorded views indicates that his was a mind characterized by keen, practical sagacity, generous sentiments, and judicious magnificence of reasoning powers. Hence it was he correctly appreciated the actual needs, advantages, perils and prospects of his surroundings.

Obtuse indeed must be one who fails to perceive something
splendid, wonderful in such a man, guided as he had been by a
dream in Ireland to his place of service in the wilds of the
Virginia Valley. Before leaving Ireland, and while frequently
praying for Divine guidance where to go, he had a dream that
profoundly impressed him, and it was ever vivid in his memory.
After coming to America he followed the stream of immigration up
the valley of Virginia until he came to Fort Defiance, a locality
that corresponded to his dream. He at once selected it as a place
for his home, where he swelt, labored, died and was buried.
honored for all time be his memory. May his example of life and faith
like all " the actions of the just,

small sweet and blessed in the dust."

The people upon whom such influences of living and practicing
were exerted, and from whose habitations invincible defenders
went to vanquish foesmen like Pontiac, Logan and Cornstalk, and
famous generals from Europe, were mainly of Scotch-Irish extraction.
The Scottish-Virginians came for the most part because there was a
rassination in the roominess and liberty that a new realm promised.
Moreover there was something attractive for such inquisitive,
daring people in the adventures and dangers that abounded.

And they remained the same unyielding characters, whether
contending for Christ and His covenant in the old world among the
Grapian hills, or reclaiming the ⁴Alleghanies of the new.
Unrestrained by redeeming grace, these people were of fiery temperment
free-and-easy, sportloving, gallant, fighting at the drop of a hat,
racing horses, playing at cards, indulging in whiskey freely as
water, swearing with an emphatic and rhetorical jingle truly
surprising. With their faults nevertheless, they've endured

with resplendent virtues of personal character and when individuals became pious it was not half-way doing with them.

In their religion the Pauline phase had precedence, and so they believed and were sure that God abhorred sin with no degree of allowance and dealt sternly and righteously with unrepentant sinners. Their belief in the Divine sovereignty was so much to imbue them with that unrelenting persistence under difficulties that so eminently prepared them for the part they were led by Providential guidance to perform, in subduing the pathless wilderness and forming new states.

The mothers were keepers at home, teaching the children and the servants the catechism, and attending church once a month, more or less as opportunity presented itself. These robust, home-loving, sweet-voiced ladies wrote no books, recited no poems nor read essays, yet were none the less fitted to do their all important part in placing deep and firmly the foundations of the institutions, civil and religious that are the precious heirlooms of their descendants.

The compiler of these Poochontee sketches will remember seeing and hearing of parties in his younger days, who brought their love affairs to a happy understanding by the means of the hymn book or the bible. One morning before services began in one of the oldest of the Valley churches a youthful, enamored member politely handed his hymn book to a lady friend in the pew just before him, with a pin stuck in the stanza he wished her to read. Whereupon she read these significant words: "Let the sweet hope that thou art mine

my life and death attend,

Thy presence through my journey shine
And crown my journey's end."

The young lady in place of blushing and whispering "This is so sudden," took another plan, for she seemed to know at once of a hymn that would meet the emergency in kind and enable her to give as good as he had sent. Returning the book with the selfsame pin for a pointer, he read therein as follows:

"All that I am and all that I have
Shall be forever thine.
Whate'er my duty bids me give
My willing hands resign."

Where now may be seen beautiful farms and substantial houses were once the log cabin, the linsy-wolsey, the short gun, the hunting shirt, the peck horse, the simple living, the deer and the rifle, the fields of flax, the loom and spinning wheel; and with them the strict attention to going to church, the reading of the Bible, and keeping Sabbath from the beginning to the end of the day; the singing of hymns and sacred songs, all blended to present a beautiful picture of enterprise; economy, and religion in laying the foundation of society.

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